

8th Mercator-IPC Talk “From the House of Friendship to Yunus Emre. A Century of German-Turkish Cultural Politics”

The 8th IPC-Mercator Talk took place on September 4, 2013. Following the introduction of the Program, by Mercator-IPC Fellowship Program Coordinator Daniel Grütjen, Mercator-IPC Senior Fellow Prof. Dr. Klaus Kreiser, and Prof. Dr. Hayati Develi, President of Yunus Emre Institute, discussed the milestones of the German-Turkish Cultural Politics over the last century.



Prof. Klaus Kreiser started his speech by outlining the objectives of his research that he undertook as Mercator-IPC Senior Fellow. Following this introduction, he proposed four subjects for discussion; tourism, Turkish self-representation by publications, translations and exhibitions. The case studies he touched upon belong to three succeeding periods. Firstly tourism and cultural propaganda during the early and high Kemalism era. Secondly, the

sponsoring of translations as an instrument for cultural policy since the 1930s and thirdly, Turkish exhibitions from 1932 to 1980s – during the time when the Turkish Diaspora in Germany was discovered as a target of Cultural Policy.

Prof. Kreiser underlined the fact that Turkish Houses (Türk Evleri) and Turkish Cultural Centers (Türk Kültür Merkezleri), among several others, were forerunners

of the institutionalization of Turkish cultural policy in Germany with the inauguration of the Yunus Emre Institute.

Coming back to the idea of the House of Friendship (*Dostluk Evi*), Prof. Kreiser suggested that the House deserves a closer look into its intended cultural function. Though the project was never materialized, Prof. Kreiser declared that he devoted sometime on the project due to the propagation of modern cultural policy concepts such as a “cultural exchange” on an equal basis, and the liberal approach the project took by limiting government involvement.

Following this thesis, Prof. Kreiser continued his presentation by outlining the Turkish cultural policy during the foundation of the Republic, and the 1930s where an increasing movement to promote Turkish culture abroad could be observed. Prof. Kreiser added that the Turkish cultural policy at that period was not basically Anti-Ottoman. In 1932 with the exhibition “Seven Centuries of Turkish Art” in Vienna,

not only a significant collection of Ottoman Art, but also the works of young artists living in a European country were displayed.

Prof. Kreiser then moved on to the post-war era, to the signature of the first German-Turkish cultural contract in 1957. He also touched upon the field of literature underlining that the Language Revolution was an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time for cultural exchange, since the number of Turks who were able to translate contemporary narrative into a major European language was limited.

In his final remarks, Prof. Kreiser addressed the status of guest workers that began arriving to Germany in the early 1960s. From then on, he stressed that a mushrooming of exhibitions of independent Turkish artists in private and public galleries could be observed.

The discussion continued by Yunus Emre Institute President Prof. Hayat Develi. Yunus Emre Institute



was established like a cultural institute similar to the Goethe Institute and the British Council. However Prof. Develi said that Cervantes is the most similar institute in comparison to Yunus Emre Institute.

Prof. Develi outlined that the main aims of the institution is to teach Turkish abroad and to present Turkish culture abroad. Prof. Develi stressed that culture included literature, music, hand crafts, etc. He also added that the Turkish that is being thought within the centers, is modern Turkish language. He argued that contrary to the 20th century, especially after the 1990s with the new world order, an interest flourished towards Turkish language and culture, and Turkey in general. However, there was a lack of human resources and infrastructure for teaching Turkish abroad. With the new demand after 1990s, according to Prof. Develi, these demands started to be met through cultural centers. In this context in 2009, the Yunus Emre Institute -attached to the Yunus Emre Foundation, started to work actively. Prof. Develi underlined that the institution is trying to be in line with the European Language Portfolio. He added that there are country specific situations, for example, in Egypt as the demand towards Turkish language is relatively high, there are two centers.

Prof. Develi also discussed another project of the institution: Turkology. He said that the departments of Turkish abroad are supported with academic staff and textbooks. Another development he mentioned was that some Balkan countries wanted to teach Turkish language as a second language in schools; thus, a special textbook was written for them. Prof. Develi stressed that they try to provide them with course books but that they are not the ones who deliver Turkish courses.

All in all Prof. Develi summarized that directly or indirectly the institute delivered Turkish courses to 30,000 people. Though the institution is perceived as a Turkish language teaching institution, Prof.

Develi stressed the fact that it's also a cultural institution and that it has a responsibility to represent cultural values abroad as well. This representation is accomplished through concerts, exhibitions, symposiums, and, workshops. Prof. Develi underlined that these activities are fairly new, dating back to three years earlier only. Prof. Develi also discussed that there is a need to roll out new projects as they are at the very beginning. It is also necessary contribute to representing tangible and intangible cultural values abroad to promote a more positive Turkish image. One last activity that Prof. Develi added was the Turkish summer school, where 350 students were distributed to 10 different universities to complete Turkish courses as well as attending various Turkish activities.

Prof. Develi concluded that the Yunus Emre Institution has an aim to work on values and introducing these values abroad. He pointed out that the Turkish culture is more like an alloy, comprising of sub cultural groups - different colors. Nonetheless the differences are all one. The 21st century is more about multi-linguistic and multi-cultural societies, he added, in line with this development, the Yunus Emre Institute also tried to contribute to the multi-cultural backbone of the society.

Following the closing remarks, Daniel Grütjen opened the floor for discussion. During the discussion the participants discussed the various topics: the reason why such an institution was founded in this period; whether the change in German-Turkish cultural policies was reflected upon the foundation of such an institution, the approach of the Turkish government for Turkish people abroad to protect their identity, and whether this phenomenon can constitute a dilemma for such institutions carrying out the responsibility for integration.